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# Going on- and offline: Following the course in the light of e-pedagogical concepts

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**Abstract.** This paper is about an ongoing research focus on the developing of e-pedagogical strategies related to profession-oriented learning and to organizational culture. In terms of methodology, the challenge is to confront classic ethnography with the modern learning context characterized by the use of welfare technologies, IT tools and social media. In terms of empirical studies, the challenge is to follow a full-scale online programme in nursing education, but also to follow the course of a shift between online- and offline activities. In light of the e-pedagogical concepts, the paper will reflect research strategies and analyse the tendencies and consequences for the digital classroom, teacher planning and the student's learning practice.

**Keywords.** ethnography, online learning, e-pedagogy, IT-based development

## 1. Background

The former comprehensive fieldwork in the upper secondary "IT schools" covered the practical tendencies at different organizational levels. Being in the area of ICT and learning, the classic ethnographic approaches were challenged not only by the new IT tools, but also by references to teacher professionalization and youth culture. Consequently, the challenge for this project was to elaborate new concepts of digital literacy and to cope with both formal- and non-formal learning situations. Related to these challenges, the school case analysis showed the practical process of implementation of the IT-based strategies, in addition to how constructions of blended learning are a matter of creating a context-sensitive mix of on- and offline situations (Borgnakke 2012).

At the same time, students create their own strategies as a new common space for interaction and communication creating what in the analysis is called the third learning space (Borgnakke 2012:165).

Referring to IT-based learning spaces, we recognize there are challenges to be met by both the field of practice and by the ethnographic research methodology. As shown in Borgnakke (Borgnakke 2013b), the challenge relates to organizational level and its activities and processes. As an example, the leader team at the case school regarded the IT-based strategies and systems such as the LMS system as their management platform, which were further challenged by the use of shifting on- and offline organizational

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activities. The faculty and teacher teams regarded the same LMS system as a matter of professional pedagogical acting challenged by the practical processes of planning, teaching and evaluation (Borgnakke 2011, 2012)

Coping with a diverse range of challenges and shifting online/offline situations is therefore in itself a challenge. The point to be stressed in this article is that in terms of the methodology, you meet the challenges by following the field.

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## 2. Following the field

“Following the field” means that the methodology recalls research strategies for multi-site and multi-level ethnography (Marcus 1995, Borgnakke 2010), while rethinking basic principles described as ecological validity (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983; Borgnakke 1996). In the programmatic article, *Ethnography: Problems and prospects*, Martin Hammersley related the need for rethinking the study of the new online cultures (Hammersley 2006). In the article, *Ethnography on IT-based learning contexts - A matter of blended methodology and blended learning*, Borgnakke confirmed the need for rethinking the classic approaches to match studies in online cultures, but criticized that Hammersley paid too little attention to the fact that most of the new settings are not exclusively online, but rather a blended mix of online- and offline situations (Borgnakke, 2013b). In a broader perspective, the situation is better described in terms of a medialized everyday culture and medialized learning culture, as stressed by media researcher Stig Hjarvard (Hjarvard 2008). Related to this concept, both the IT-based learning context in general and the online education exemplified further in the paper will be described as an ongoing series of online- and offline activities.

In summarizing the methodological principle about ecological validity, the data and document collection can be regarded as an “authentic mix” mirroring IT-based strategies by coming directly from the process of implementation from the different school levels and parties. Furthermore, the collection mirrors how all components, voices and contradictions are already embedded in the practical pattern and in the digital process. Basically, this means that the ethnographic framework must be regarded as “a mix of methods and voices” blended to the same degree as the field of practice.

This statement, “blended to the same degree as the field of practice”, is a conclusion given in Borgnakke (Borgnakke 2013b) in relation to ethnographic work coping with both the political and institutional macro-, meso- and micro levels. To a high degree, “the authentic mix” having ecological validity will be a collection

referring to policy documents, laws, programmes and strategies followed by a material of curriculum and plans for the process of teaching. At the same time, the point is that these materials all are included in: 1) organizational websites, the intranet and the LMS system (e.g. Lectio, Fronter and Moodle), and in 2) the spectrum of used devices. The point is also that the materials and used devices mirror what is officially allowed and recommended in a learning context and what is not. For example, the use of Facebook was not allowed for a period of time during school hours in one of the case schools.

Based on the principle of “following the field of practice”, there are therefore important data collections referring to the process and overview of the official agenda, as well as to small details in non-official agendas in IT-based learning.

In relation to current research, “following the field” means that we are following the starting process in a new online education in healthcare. In the starting phase, we had a focus on how the teacher teams conceptualize IT-based strategies and build up the e-pedagogical platform. The first characterization of both the technology and the teacher team will be that they are to be described as innovative and up-front. But during the first year, the teacher teams also show how in a professional sense online teachers depend on “sticking to the conventional procedure”, as the teachers were asking for “business as usual”. This observed double logic stresses that being in an innovative unpredictable process also demands routines and well-known procedures.

Case studies and conversations with teachers involved in the developing of Online BA and Master’s Degrees in Dentistry at the University of Michigan<sup>30</sup> further confirmed that by stressing the importance of using “the already existing IT-platform” and by using “the ordinary IT-tools” in the e-pedagogical platform. And while working with the curriculum, the Online dentist teacher teams ask the institution: “not to renew during the process”. “We depend on stability” the teachers stressed, and as one of the teachers continue:

When it comes to technology, there is nothing fancy about the Online course. Actually, we are very sad when something “new” happens on the UM platform. We depend on the system, and depending on that system means functioning like “business as usual”. The degree of usability is at a maximum level as long everything just functions like normal.” (Cit. Borgnakke 2012, online teacher conversation, UM Dentistry)

Following the teacher’s professional voice there will be a version of the IT platform in which you highlight questions about curriculum and didactics, almost forgetting the IT part. But it is also the teacher’s voice reminding of the fact that online education is “different”, and not only an electrified education. As a member of the teacher team at the Danish online nursing programme, NETeducation, formulated in a newsletter:

“What is it then about being so different and what are the demands of my role as a teacher? One of the biggest differences and challenges is that I am not seeing the student face-to-face that often. It therefore feels harder to get to learn to know the students. It feels harder to follow the student’s process of learning and hard to know if they have gained the learning result predicted in the process of teaching. Another huge difference is

<sup>30</sup> Karen Borgnakke collected material for case studies in IT-based learning contexts and did field observations on the campus of University of Michigan October- November 2012. Descriptions of Online Dental see further Gwozek et al. (2011) and Springfield et al. (2012).

that the teaching form I used on the ordinary courses such as, e.g. lectures or “classroom teaching with discussion” cannot necessarily be transformed to online education. Online education therefore asks for totally different demands to the process of planning and teaching.” (Cit. newsletter no. 2 VIA University College)

Following these teacher teams being a part of the first year of the NETeducation, you realize not only what is conceptualized as “new” and different demands, but also what we need to appreciate and secure from the “old” face-to-face teaching. To mix and to blend seem to also be a fruitful strategy in a broader organizational sense, in which the institution makes sure that the Online students will be offered phases with clinical practice, face-to-face seminars, tutoring, etc.

Summarizing the ethnographic principle, the examples given above mean that the statement “following the field using blended methods” literally speaking means covering blended organizational actions, networking with the teacher teams preparing the syllabus and assignments, participating in virtual discussions and participating in the students’ individual and collaborative work and learning processes. But following the field and the professional voices also means covering new web-based materials and coping with the technical culture and field constructions of ICT and learning platforms.

### **3. Covering the new materials – coping with the technical culture and constructions of the ICT field**

From an organizational and cultural perspective, the new type of material is first and foremost the schools’ web-sites and homepages. The homepages can be regarded as a late modern ideal type, and can be conceptualized like Schein’s face values (Schein 2004). An important genre addition we recognized at the former IT school cases was The School IT CV, which is comparable with the Curriculum Vitae, but with a focus on the institution (Borgnakke 2009; Laugesen 2012). Today, we can add that websites which include IT CVs refer to the school’s IT performativity. Furthermore, for online educational innovation, the IT performance and the websites are vivid. The example in the centre for the current case study is of course NETeducation, namely the IT performance from VIA University College, which is hosting the NETeducation central. The experienced example related to the aforementioned Online UM Dental makes the hosting and performative position very clear, e.g. by giving the Online education a website of their own. But the genres and the vivid character are best illustrated by the newest international project called, Coursera, which offers online university courses. Highly ranked universities such as Stanford University are behind the initiative though having an elite university behind it seems to stress the necessity of what is being up-front, namely the Coursera Portal. This portal is the front door, but it is also like a house, insofar as hosting a range of Online courses. Following the newest development of Coursera, you can see a certain mix between videos, pictures and texts being characteristic. The point of departure is to be described as multi-modality. At the same time we can describe an Online portal such as Coursera as a collection of narratives referring directly to the academic learning context, to the institution, to the teacher team and to the teaching person, as well as to the academic subject matter and the related IT performance.

The new material can be described in the same way as the organizational and cultural concepts from Schein, but needs to be combined with concepts from analyses of organizations being influenced by IT strategies such as the concept of "technucation" (Søndergaard and Hasse 2012) or "technacy situated in the learning context" (Borgnakke 2012). Furthermore, it is important to reflect on what Raymond Kolbæk calls "attitudes to ICT" (Kolbæk 2013). Investigating the field of nursing education, Kolbæk presents an Bourdieu-inspired conceptualization of the construction of the ICT field and of types of nursing students' attitudes and their "ICT habitus and ICT capital", while also mapping decades of IT implementation (1970-2000). Given this contemporary background, the policy documents and practical implementation are represented by different players attitude and impact on IT based strategies. The IT habitus and ICT capital related to statements differ from "IT is a matter in its own right" to "IT is just an online tool with a pencil and paper" to "IT is an integrated part of the organization's development".

Kolbæk's data collections refer to surveys (Kolbæk 1999 and Kolbæk 2002) and focus interview mirroring the characteristic process of IT implementation. As shown in Kolbæk's analysis, the process starts in the offices and libraries (pcs, information- and searching machines), and seems to be less implemented in a teaching and practical learning context. "Less implemented" seems to relate to a central theme and contrast constructed in the field between "warm hands and cold technology".

The analysis of the IT habitus (identified among the 22 informants) shows how the use of social media has had an impact on both human social relations in the sphere of family and the relation in the sphere of professional nursing work. In the centre of informant statements is the experience of the borders for physical relations being moved, as well as an increasing risk for non-personal relations (ibid.). Closer to the field of nursing education, Kolbæk shows the IT habitus as a construction of the four types called, "The Advocate, The Sceptic, The Opponent and The Critic". In the analysis, Kolbæk is coping with the spectra from the optimistic trust in IT based strategies to concepts of IT as a time stealer and a non-serious communication with robot technology as the de-humanized scenario of the future. In the middle of the spectra, you recognize mediated attitudes, but also a sharper critique, e.g. a critique of "the educational under use" of technology in the teaching and learning practice.

Kolbæk's analysis is important for the empirical analyses of the organizational and cultural aspects, although characteristic tendencies are already conceptualized in Mark Prensky's, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* (Prensky 2001). If the younger generation are digital natives, we can add to Kolbæk's analysis that there is a specific relation between educational culture and the next generation of students. Even so, mapping the organizational culture and the educational process as a whole means following the new common baseline for the classroom: teachers and students being on- and offline and participating in activities described as blended learning and surrounded by IT and media.

To summarize the technical culture means that the IT-based learning context has consequences for not only the next generation of students, but also for the next generation of the classroom.

#### 4. Next generation of classroom

Focussing on the next generation as “the digital classroom”, you recognize the new routine related to a blended strategy. To put this in perspective, an analysis on IT school cases shows how the teachers used the blended strategies to make changes in the traditional patterns, “moving from teacher-directed teaching to student-directed working and learning” (Borgnakke 2012).

The strategies refer to progressive traditions such as John Dewey’s (1990), “Learning by doing”, as well as to the new e-pedagogical tendencies and terms such as “innovation and creativity” combined with project learning (Borgnakke 2004; Hobel 2012). Inspired by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), we can further conceptualize IT based learning as situated learning, community of practice and thereby identify newcomer- and old-timer strategies.

Given these general patterns, there are nuances in the field’s constructions of ICT-based models and strategies. Nevertheless, in a practical context, we can identify the major challenge referring to both students’ profession-oriented project work and to teachers’ professional teamwork.

In the case earlier described as UM Online Dental, it is stressed that the IT-based strategies at both the BA and MA levels are aimed at enhancing the student’s profession-oriented action and reflection. As one of the leader teams stressed in a conversation about the strategy: “Acting/reflection close to the professional standard is implicit in the reference for the development”. Further refers the leader to the professional team as a background for the group and as the basic unit. As the leader puts it: “The professional team is certainly groups and one learns and reflects better in groups, therefore we consider the group to be the unit.” At the same time, the leader exemplified and summarized the important stages for the IT-based learning process, described as:

”The Triple Jump

1. The students start with ideas and a description of a patient situation;
2. The students realize the pressure from the professional practice, and are able to raise the question of ”what to do”;
3. The students are forced to reflect (diagnosis/treatment, suggestions) and decide ”what I can do”.

When asked how the IT tools and IT-based strategies are helping these jumps, the leader answers that ”stage 2” in particular is full of opportunities, e.g. the database.” (cit. Leader conversation UM, Borgnakke 2012, field notes).

Against this backdrop, the most important issues for the IT-based learning context are stressed as the following three:

- “The degree of integration – to which degree are the IT tools integrated into the daily routine of teaching and in the learning practice?”
  - The ideal type decides (or the context decides) in terms of callings, such as the classic lecture calling for a web-cast or podcast, the classroom teaching calling for blended learning, a flipped classroom and project work and the student-oriented group work calling for the IT tools to be implemented.
  - The process of learning and the basic forms”
- (Borgnakke 2012 UM, field notes).

With reference to conversations with the leading- and teaching teams at UM Dental, the conversation made it clear that professional self-evaluation and programme evaluation were high on the agenda. The teacher teams further referred to articles in the

*Journal of Dental Education* and hereby they referred to the important steps being similar to the title, *Using Online Program Development to Foster Curricular Change and Innovation* (Gwozdek et al. 2011) in addition to being stressed in the articles abstract: “Program evaluation is a necessary component of curricular change and innovation” (Springfield et al. 2012).

From the teachers’ point of view, this self-evaluation went hand-in-hand with “the four important experiences” from the ongoing development work with online learning. As stressed by Borgnakke in field notes:

“(…) when asked, the teacher highlighted the four most important experiences from the process with the Online programme by giving me the following list:

- 1) Developing the curriculum; 2) Acting like a team; 3) To make it happen; 4) Contribution to lifelong learning.”

(Cit. field notes UM, Borgnakke 2012).

In this case “developing the curriculum” and “acting like a team” were closely related to challenges for educational development among professionals. At the same time, we recognize how the challenge is also related to the developing of the Online setting as e-pedagogical strategies aimed at the students’ activities. As stressed below, the important experiences from the Danish Online learning programme from the first phase shall be seen in light of the new e-pedagogical strategies.

## 5. In light of e-pedagogical strategies

The development project is called NETeducation, which is stressed as a web-based education in Nursing, hosted by VIA University College. From the outset, the purpose of the NETeducation was described by the planning team as an attempt to develop an e-didactic approach to professional learning (Nielsen et al. 2011), but it was also stressed that this should be seen in relation to the technology-based healthcare: “To develop an e-didactic concept that through the form of planning can prepare students to be included as employees in a digital and high-tech healthcare” (ibid.). Or as highlighted in the information material on the homepage of NETeducation for the next year of study:

“The Net-based Nursing Program is an offer for you, if you

- want to be in front in IT-based- and user-friendly approaches in the nursing and welfare sector;
- find it interesting to use IT and social media;
- want to learn via digital media in close collaborative work with fellow students;
- need flexible time for studies and courses”

(Cit. NETeducation, InFo-material Aarhus 2013).

As can be seen, this focus on preparing students to enter into a digital and high-tech healthcare is a part of the innovative approach and its different aims. Firstly, the e-pedagogical strategy must be innovative by integrating technology development in education planning, and secondly by creating the curriculum development. Thirdly, the strategy must be open for additions during the process and be open for the students’ own learning strategies and motivations. In planning NETeducation as an innovative educational project, it is expected that by the students’ work through a variety of digital media, they achieve, in addition to understanding the professional content, an



understanding of the use of digital media in the future of nursing practice. Against this background, NETeducation writes itself into the international discourse on the digitized high-tech healthcare that challenges professional education programmes to develop their curriculum and support lifelong learning. In this respect, we find broad similarities with Online Michigan. On the other hand, it is pointed out that there are also differences in the e-pedagogic double strategy as represented by the Danish Online education. Although e-pedagogic is primarily oriented towards the development of scholastic dimensions, it also embraces the clinical settings - at least by and in line with the other Danish web-based education, being oriented towards the entire nursing education. In addition, the web-based courses and e-pedagogic strategies is in a continuous dialogue with the other ordinary nursing education which they both look at and alternate with.

However, NETeducation in VIA has made a conscious choice to clarify the special e-pedagogical approach and hereby try Gilly Salmon's so-called, "five-stage model of teaching and learning online" (Salmon 2011). The Curriculum team described the model as both a "stage model" and as a "scaffolding model". And as quoted below, the very e-pedagogical centre for a student's activity is the so-called e-tivities:

"The model has two basic elements: an E-moderator, who along the way makes the summary of the discussions and e-tivities, which are activities that students should perform (purpose, goal and deadline). Each stage requires the participants (students and teachers) to master certain technical skills." (Cit. "NETeducation på langs set i forhold til Salmon og teknologi" (NETeducation longitudinally in proportion to Salmon and technology) Document, The Curriculum team, VIAuc).

As with other ordinary nurse educations, NETeducation includes both academic and professionally oriented elements, so therefore the e-pedagogical strategy needs to be aimed both to the scholastic and clinical professional learning context.

The theoretical learning context is organized by alternating between online- and offline periods and face-to-face seminar days on campus, while the NETeducation follows the trend of a blended- and profession-oriented learning approach (Borgnakke 2009; Gworzek et al. 2011; Springfield et al. 2012). Although Salmon's e-pedagogical concept is moderated, it remains as an argument for both e-tivities described in relation to the five stages and for seminar days described in relation to the ongoing course. Against this background, the reflections on further details such as considerations of seminar days also refer to local reports in which the heads of training divisions expected that the blended learning approach provides a better retention for the students (Pasgaard 2012). Nonetheless, the main argument was the widespread doxa among teachers, namely that even education in the theoretical part of a profession such as nursing requires time being spent together by students and teachers.

The clinical learning context in NETeducation is focusing on the practical importance of learning in the communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). As described on the homepage, the students' innovative use of a wide range of digital media is expected to continue into the clinical learning context, as an emerging critical understanding of technology is also expected. In light of the chosen e-pedagogical strategies, the first semester of the NETeducation has displayed difficulties in finding clinical internships that match the technology development, which seems to have captured the students in these non-simultaneous developments. In part, the students are new in the nursing profession and could be expected to start with a legitimate peripheral participation as newcomers (ibid.), while in part they come with a digital knowledge that does not exist in the communities of practice. The evaluation showed

that these no-simultaneous developments were tackled very differently: the students in some departments taught the communities of practice, whereas it was pointed out to other students that the digital focus was not part of the learning context. For NETeducation, the e-pedagogical challenge will therefore be one in the series of the challenges of being in a profession with a focus on aligning the interaction between scholastic learning and practical learning.

## **6. Organizational learning, first phases and start-up troubles**

In order to collect experience, NETeducation, like Michigan, has professional self-evaluation as a part of its framework to ensure coherence between the responsibility to act in order to investigate the action and to follow up (Dahler-Larsen 2003). The self-evaluation is going on in the community, where it gives voice to the teachers in both clinical and theoretical settings, to the students and to the IT team. The project participants can thereby ensure that the evaluation is used for continuous learning and development.

NETeducation gets a student evaluation a half year into the programme, which reads: "It has been so much more fun to go on Module 2 than on Module 1, because some of those start-up problems and frustrations over networks, the web page was gone... it's been 200% more fun" (Cit. Student Module 2). As stated, there has been an evolution, but there have also been some "start-up problems". The IT aspects should be expected by NETeducation to be a challenge, as there was not an optimal LMS system available and teachers were in IT-related skills development. The students evaluated that there has also been technical failures with links that do not work in the students' module guides, learning resources which cannot be opened and the like. All this is something that has stressed the students, since it goes beyond their planning as they first discover errors when seated and should have worked with the subject material. Nor was the NETeducation prepared for the students having a widespread lack of IT skills. There were some students who had achieved technacy (Borgnakke 2012), but also a student who had heard of Google, but not yet attempted to use it.

Feedback has also been something that affects both the students' learning strategies and educational planning. The teachers have e-tivities planned with feedback given by them, as well as feedback from fellow students in the form of, e.g. two study groups that comment on each other's work. The students prefer feedback only from the teacher, and that it is given in relation to all e-tivities, since they feel it is their only way to know if they have understood things right. At the same time, the student usually only reads feedback if it falls during or right after work with the e-tivity; otherwise, the students are on to the next thing. For teachers, it has been a time problem and a didactic challenge. These included the increased time needed if there feedback to be given on everything, but also to provide feedback while it is still perceived as appropriate to receive.

The biggest surprise for NETeducation was the students' perception that they are being overlooked in relation to the campus-based education. Students at NETeducation believe that they are not offered the same social and academic extra-curricular activities than the other students, in which the teacher team's experience is that rarely has a class been the subject of so much consideration, discussion and attention.

But there has not only been “start-up problems”, as the students have continuously evaluated the e-tivities and the structure that they provide positively.

## 7. Paradoxes

With the choice of Salmon's e-pedagogical strategy, with e-tivities as the main didactic element, a structure is also provided for both teachers and students.

Project NETeducation is aware that the clarification of the specific e-pedagogical strategy is changing the teachers' didactic approach.

”One can learn with IT, but learning and the learning environment should be organized to take into account the difference between e-learning and face-to-face learning”. (Cit. ”Introduction to e-didactics”. Document, Curriculum team, VIAuc)

But it has nevertheless been a surprise to the Curriculum team as to how long this didactic transformation has taken. As one of the teachers previously stated in the article, even if their workload is situated differently, the teachers cannot simply transfer their normal teaching activities to the online course, which has led to organizational influences, and for some of the teachers the desire for “business as usual”.

The teachers are also fascinated by the structure. At their evaluation, they were very absorbed by the fact that they could not follow the students' work process, and thus not help in guiding them to higher learning outcomes. Students are introduced to a workflow in the e-tivities, and then nothing visibly happens to the teachers. The reason for this is not because the students gather on Facebook or other external media, but because they make use of some of the digital media that the NETeducation provides. Some groups work on- and offline in closed forums in the LMS system, and only release the finished product in the open forum. Other groups interact almost only through Lync (an extended kind of Skype), and also only release their finished product in the open forum. During an evaluation with the teacher's team, where this expectation was given much speaking time, the external evaluator wondered whether teachers can follow the students working process in the campus-based nursing education. The teacher team's self-understanding was mirrored, and they started wondering how this expectation had been created in relation to NETeducation.

With a background in Salmon's description (Salmon 2002), NETeducation has developed a template that all teachers must follow. E-tivities provide students with a structured guide as to how they are expected to work with the academic content from a motivational, purposeful and detailed description of tasks, learning resources and feedback. E-tivities will be formulated as concrete learning activities to be done in relation to the five stages from the basic technical practical level to the reflexive level, building knowledge and sharing resources with other students. NETeducation has added deadlines and study load to that, which has given the students a management tool that the vast majority of the students have accepted with open arms.

The students are part of a bit of a paradox, as they have all chosen NETeducation because of the flexibility it has given them. Flexibility is often necessary because of offline activities such as obligations to family or the necessity of having to work alongside one another. The paradox arises because while students want flexibility, they are also incredibly delighted with e-tivities and their wealth of detail compared to what

is expected of them and when. The students find that they provide structure, thus helping them to plan their study, which strongly requires them to actively study.

“You can go in and look in your calendar ... in this week we have this e-tivity, well, then we start there, and then you read the e-tivity through and then from this we work through the topic, otherwise I never get through the topics, ... so I do not know where to start and where to end if we had not ...” (Cit. student, Module 1 evaluation).

Secondly, e-tivities has a clear expectation from the teacher, and all e-activities include a group-based part that is particularly binding, since all work is otherwise left to the others in the study group. Flexibility is thereby reduced to a certain extent, while the strong structuring can also create an expectation that e-tivities can control all types of learning processes. In any case, some of the students wondered “that there was no e-tivities in clinical training, now it had to be a web-based education” (Cit. student Module 1).

Even though the students have chosen an online education, several of them seem to have elements of the usual scholastic thinking as a sounding board. For example, at the end of a seminar day a student exclaims that they should have more of this “real education”, which several nod in agreement with. Initially, several students also had the experience that they were standing without teachers. Although opportunities for guidance and the like were described in the e-tivities, they evaluated that they should “learn” that the teachers were also online. Hence, it was a process that they had to go through. When this is compared with the paradox about flexibility and structure, it could give the impression that the NET students see themselves as traditional students, but with more freedom. They want teachers to give structure to their learning, but with freedom. It should be flexible, but more like face-to-face teaching. The students are then almost doubly linked since they fetch elements from being a traditional campus-based student and being NET students.

In the spring of 2013, a half year into NETeducation, the self-evaluation has been extended with traditional ethnographic observations based on interaction and face-to-face communication on seminar days and in clinical settings. Observations have also been made in relation to how the teaching and learning is organized in the Digital Classroom and how the new routine is related to the Digital Classroom and its settings with on- and offline interactions, since a vast majority of the students' time is spent online. Field observations at the student's home are seen as a methodological opportunity to shed light on how the students create their own strategies and space for interaction, communication and learning.

## 8. Summarizing the basic principle

Concerning the basic principle “following the field of practice” and the necessity of rethinking the learning context in light of the digital conditions, we need to renew the basic concepts of ‘the field, the context and the space’ related to the classic ethnographic approach and fieldwork (Marcus 1995; Borgnakke 1996, 1999). Doing that we are in accordance with the latest interpretation of ethnography in Online communities (Hammersley 2006; Hernandez Hernandez et al. 2013; Webster and Marques da Silva 2013). But we also want to stress along with Leander and McKim (Leander and McKim 2002), the necessity of a rethinking moving beyond a place-

based ethnography. In the article, *Tracing the Everyday "Sittings" of Adolescents on the Internet: A strategic adaptation of ethnography across online and offline spaces*, Leander and McKim argue for the need to move beyond place-based ethnography and develop ethnographic methodologies that follow the moving, traveling practices of adolescents on- and offline. Here, the authors challenged the conventional ethnography on questions such as place, identity and participant observation, while also challenging what they called "a common misconception of the Internet" as being radically separate from everyday life. Next, they stressed that the methodologies "following connections and circulations in research that travel across online- and offline spaces" include tracing the flows of objects, texts and the embedded multiple contexts.

Leander and McKim made the above statement in 2002 and the ongoing e-pedagogical development has made the statements even more obvious. On behalf of the ongoing projects, we will state that there is no possible common misconception. The Internet is not to be regarded as radically separate from everyday life, but as a very integrated part of everyday life. And as shown in the first field observations of the NETeducation students at their home work places and spaces, the students are not only using the NET educational platform, working with e-tivities on a daily basis. They are also add their own daily routine of using a mix of the Internet, mobile phones and Facebook, "all the time" working with their own assignments and networking with fellow students (field note Lyngsø fall 2013).

On behalf of these on-going observations and projects in which the online educational settings and e-pedagogical frameworks will be investigated by following the course, we are therefore confronted with both the basic principle of ethnography and of communication and confronted with a blended strategy integrating organizational ethnography, classroom and learning research into a common framework coping with the digital every day conditions (Borgnakke 2013a, 2013b).

From an organizational perspective, the ethnographic framework will sharpen the complex of e-pedagogical and professional IT didactical issues. At the same time, close-up studies will shed light on the process of online learning as seen from the student's perspective. Following online and offline activities in their original time and practical setting, observations in the students' homes seem to generate the needed data collection mirroring how the students create their own strategies and space for interaction, communication and learning.

In the current empirical phases, both the self-evaluation and research projects show how strategies for following on- and offline activities have an impact on the basic principle, as well as on the principle of ecological validity. In a concrete manner, we are therefore confronted with the question of ecological validity as a proper mix of multi-methods and flows between policy documents, institutionally mediated communication between teachers and students, a mix between learning contexts, a mix between online and offline text, oral and written, images and messages, etc. As a result, the blended methodology is constantly challenged by classic ethnographic approaches and digital processes. Or we may say that the digital processes are challenged by being classically observed and reflected in terms of ethnographically mapping the flow and the field of relation.

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